



MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

THE **OUTSIDE** IS IN US ALL.

Meeting Date: August 13, 2020

Agenda Item: Cree Crossing WMA Addition, Region 6

Action Needed: Endorsement **Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 5 minutes

Background: FWP proposes a 171-acre fee title addition to the Cree Crossing WMA, which is located 20 miles northeast of Malta. The proposed addition is on the south side of the Milk River, across the river from the current WMA. The proposed addition primarily consists of sub-irrigated river bottom cropland (~115 acres) with other portions of the property consisting of historic cottonwood floodplain, a small oxbow wetland, mixed shrub and grassland, as well as 1.4 miles of Milk River riparian habitat. The property falls within the Glaciated Plains Focus Area of Montana's Comprehensive Fish and Wildlife Conservation Strategy and could be very productive for wildlife. USDA FSA statistics indicate that more than 75% of the riparian shrub grassland along the Milk River has been converted to grain and domestic hay production. Under this proposal, FWP would incorporate this parcel into the existing WMA management plan, including actively expanding riparian and upland habitats. Some cropland would continue to be farmed as part of the existing WMA farming lease arrangement to provide forage and to assist in establishing wildlife cover. The proposed addition would also support an estimated 500-750 hunter days and 150-200 fishing days of public access annually.

Public Involvement Process & Results: FWP has not sought formal public review of this proposal. Upon endorsement by the commission, FWP would conduct an initial public evaluation. Depending on the response, FWP may proceed further with an environmental analysis including additional public involvement and review.

Alternatives and Analysis: Proposal alternatives and analysis would be conducted by FWP if this proposal receives commission endorsement.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale: FWP recommends the commission endorse this proposal. This would be a strategic addition to the WMA in an area of high value wildlife habitat, offering an opportunity for additional habitat restoration and expanded public recreation.

Proposed Motion: I move the commission endorse the proposed Cree Crossing WMA Addition, allowing FWP to conduct further due diligence, analysis, and public review.